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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

4 February 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Comment on the Anatole Shub Article in the 4 February
Issue of the Washington Post

1. We do not regard the strong praise of Stalin's wartime leadership, printed in the Soviet party journal Kommunist and reported by Shub, as of any great significance in and of itself. There is nothing very new either in the specific passages he quotes or for that matter in favorable comment on Stalin's wartime role in general. There have been official efforts almost since the day Khrushchev fell to refurbish the image of Stalin, and by now his rehabilitation as a wartime leader has become an accomplished fact. What is significant is the appearance of this praise of Stalin by prominent Soviet military figures and the simultaneous publication in the same journal of a "new" document (dating from the 1936 Comintern) which quotes Stalin on the prospects of a new war.

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2. We are inclined to interpret the publication of these articles together as evidence that certain hard-line leaders including military men are using the Stalin issue -- and the denigration of Khrushchev -- as a pretext to bolster their position on current policy questions. In effect, what they are saying is that Stalin had seen the possibility of war as early as 1936 and, accordingly, had prepared the USSR for that eventuality. (Khrushchev, of course, had denied that Stalin did either.) And, as an extension of this line of thought, they are arguing that the present Soviet leadership must adopt similar attitudes today.

3. If these articles relate to Soviet military policy, the most likely issue would be the USSR's decision to enter talks with the US on strategic arms limitations. There have been numerous signs over the past few months that elements both in and outside the military have been arguing that an arms control agreement would imperil the USSR's defense posture. The reference to Stalin's perspicacity in these recent articles seems intended to point up a moral for the present: that preparations for the contingency of war should not be diminished.

4. It is possible, of course, that no particular policy question is involved, and that what we are seeing is a reflection

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of some sort of political contest, perhaps between "neo-Stalinists" and their opponents in the regime. There have, moreover, been previous indications of possible infighting: according to clandestine reports there have been sharp differences of attitude on the problem of Czechoslovakia; the shooting incident at the Kremlin has not yet been explained; and Kosygin's lengthy absence from Moscow has drawn conflicting explanations from Soviet official spokesmen. Against this background, the publication of these articles could suggest that ultra-conservative forces in the leadership are attempting to seize the initiative and to steer the Soviet leadership towards a more inflexible and uncompromising course both at home and abroad.

5. The kind of evidence we are dealing with here is, of course, suggestive and not at all conclusive. Yet this is the sort of indication we might expect to see in the relatively early phases of a power struggle within the Soviet leadership.



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